

THE PROTESTANT WORK ETHIC TODAY

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Voices are being raised with increasing intensity against a manner of thinking and living referred to as the Protestant work ethic. These voices come both from within and without the Protestant camp. Hard core poverty, racial strife, and executives' ulcers are among the evils laid at its feet. Although the scholars continue to debate the relationship of Protestantism to capitalism and the so-called work ethic, most would agree that the Reformation brought a new perspective to human work and made the matter of work a moral issue as never before. Any attempt to define this ethic is beset by conflicting studies, statements, and stereotypes. One popular description of the attitude under consideration is that

Christians ought to work hard, use their time carefully, spend their money cautiously, avoid luxuries, relax not for its own sake but in order to be able to work harder, and save all the money possible to give themselves a solid base.¹

The purpose of this article is to clarify some of the terms involved and to evaluate the concept in the light of present-day challenges.

I. The Historical Development of the Work Ethic

Any discussion of the relationship of Protestantism to work should begin with Martin Luther's doctrine of vocation. Through his translation of I Corinthians 7:17, 20 and Ecclesiasticus 11:20-21 the term "vocation" or "calling" (*beruf*), previously used to denote "God's summons to salvation," came to refer also to one's "trade," "job," or "position in life."²

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1. Donald Oden, "Work Work Work," *The Other Side*, 6:10, November–December, 1970.
2. For detailed discussion see Karl Holl, "The History of the Work Vocation (*Beruf*)," *Review and Expositor*, 55:126-54, April, 1958, and Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 207, n. 3.

This perspective on vocation is related to Luther's enunciation of the "priesthood of all believers" and his attacks upon monasticism. Luther may have been influenced in this by John Tauler, who earlier had noted the spiritual significance of certain kinds of secular work.³ It is important to remember that for Luther the new use of "vocation" did not refer exclusively to work, but more broadly to position. To be a father, a wife, or a son was as much a vocation as to be a cobbler or professor. The essential elements in any calling or combination of callings were the expression of love to one's neighbor and obedience to God.⁴ He said,

What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord God . . . Therefore we should accustom ourselves to think of our position and work as sacred and well-pleasing to God, not on account of the position and the work, but on account of the word and faith from which the obedience and the work flow.⁵

Max Weber,⁶ Ernst Troeltsch,⁷ and others would say that John Calvin and his followers took the doctrine of vocation a number of steps further. Man not only served God *in* his work but *by* his work. God had ordained that man should work, even though He Himself was the actual giver of all things to all men. The sum of all the Christian vocations made up the Holy Community, through which God was to be glorified as men labored to meet their mutual needs. Society owed each man the right to work, and Calvin, in the administration of Geneva, exercised considerable ingenuity in providing employment of some kind for everyone.⁸

At this point Weber's argument, which links Protestantism, and particularly Calvinism, to modern capitalism, may be briefly summarized. Other societies have demonstrated greed for gain and even forms of economic capitalism. However, the Protestant doctrine of vocation gave work a moral quality. For the Calvinist, material success was a proof of election.

3. Holl, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

4. For the best exposition and interpretation in English of Luther's view see Gustav Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, translated by Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1967).

5. Quoted by Robert McAfee Brown in *The Spirit of Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 109.

6. *Op. cit.*, *passim*.

7. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, translated by Olive Wyon (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), pp. 603-628.

8. Andre Bieler, *The Social Humanism of Calvin*, translated by Paul T. Fuhrmann (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), pp. 45-6.

These motivations led to hard work and financial gain. However, Protestantism also had an ascetic strain which denounced luxuries. The tendency then was to plow the profits back into the business itself, thereby placing Protestants foremost among business leaders and owners of capital, and in the vanguard of the development of modern capitalism.

Weber's thesis has not gone unchallenged.⁹ Anti-capitalistic Protestants and non-Protestant capitalists, among others, have sought to disassociate the religious from the economic movement. H. M. Robertson¹⁰ has argued persuasively that the Protestant usage of the term "calling" or "vocation" was not so new as was often supposed and that even the Protestant usage tended more toward conservatism and passivity than toward any radical sort of acquisitiveness. Furthermore, modern capitalism had its forerunners in Jewish, Catholic, and pagan societies. Its development in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was promoted more by new industrial and bookkeeping methods than by any religious sanction. Concurrent with the Reformation

a new hard-working, hard-headed type had sprung into prime importance . . . these "bourgeois" were unwilling to accept a burden of sin thrust upon them by a Church which was unsympathetic because ignorant of their ways . . . It was left for the churches to find a place for this newly important class.¹¹

Whether as a result of theology, economic changes, or climate (it is easier to work diligently in Northern Europe than in the Mediterranean or Equatorial areas), Protestantism did come to embrace a rather high estimation of hard work and its fruits. "Busy-ness," even when not directly related to "business," became a virtue. Time assumed new importance and even a minute's idleness was condemned. It may be noted that the high reputation which Swiss watches (with minute hands) enjoy is largely attributable to the exodus of Protestant watchmakers from France to Geneva after the Edict of Nantes was revoked.¹² Any Puritan exposition of the fourth commandment put almost as much emphasis upon

9. For an excellent collection of excerpts from the debate over the Weber thesis see Robert W. Green (ed.), *Protestantism and Capitalism: The Weber Thesis and its Critics* (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1959). See also Georgia Harkness, *John Calvin: The Man and His Ethics* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), pp. 181-82.

10. *Aspects of the Rise of Economic Individualism: A Criticism of Weber and His School* (New York: Kelley and Millman, Inc., 1959).

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 166-7.

12. Sebastian de Grazia, *Of Time, Work, and Leisure* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1962), pp. 314-15.

"six days shalt thou labor" as upon "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." In one such exposition Thomas Watson, in 1692, said

Time is a talent to trade with, both in our particular and general callings . . . A man may as well go to hell for not working in his calling, as for nor believing.¹³

Anglicans joined Puritans in condemning idleness, exalting the positive value of work, and the idea of secular work as a calling.¹⁴ Webber says that the persecution which eighteenth century Methodist workmen met at the hands of their comrades was not principally because of their religious eccentricities, for England had seen many and more striking ones before. It was rather, as the destruction of their tools (a commonly mentioned form of harrassment) suggests, because of their zealousness in work.¹⁵

With the increasingly high estimate of work, there developed, particularly among later Puritanism, the corollary that the poor were the victims of their own laziness. "Charity" was a disservice, for it only served to perpetuate their plight. R. H. Tawney sees the development of vagrancy laws, work houses, and other measures against paupism, including the enclosure of pastureland, a result of this attitude characterized by an extreme individualism. Although Calvin had delivered imprecations against the oppressors of the poor, neither in his own generation nor afterward were these taken as seriously on either side of the economic chasm as the injunctions to docile and diligent toil.¹⁶

All these views were transplanted to the New World where they flourished and produced many hybrids. Not only capitalism, but the individualism, commonly identified with the Protestant or Puritan work ethic are seen here as nowhere else, so that some might prefer to speak of it as the American work ethic. Indeed Weber opens his chapter on "The Spirit of Capitalism" with a number of quotations from Benjamin Franklin. Though Weber does not make the mistake of considering Franklin a Puritan, he considers him an heir of that tradition and viewpoint. In this secularized form the ideal is the honest man of recognized

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13. *The Ten Commandments*, revised edition (London: The Banner of Truth Truth, 1965), p. 97.
 14. Timothy H. Breen, "The Non-Existent Controversy: Puritan and Anglican Attitudes on Work and Wealth, 1600-1640," *Church History*, 35:277, September, 1966.
 15. Weber, *Op. cit.*, p. 63.
 16. Tawney, *passim*.

credit who has the duty of increasing his capital.¹⁷ Had Weber written more recently he might have utilized more vivid quotations from Henry Ford:

Work is our sanity, our self-respect, our salvation. Through work and work alone may health, wealth, and happiness inevitably be secured.¹⁸

Troeltsch would probably consider both Franklin and Ford direct descendants of Calvinism, although neither would have called himself a Calvinist, for in commenting on the cultural results in nations educated by Calvinism he says,

Once this psychological state of mind has been created, it can then, through a process of metamorphosis of purpose be detached from its original meaning, and placed at the disposal of other ideas.¹⁹

If America's national character, even in its more secular manifestations, bears the stamp of the Protestant work ethic, the ethic itself and current challenges to it deserve greater attention than some American Protestants have given them.

II. Current Challenges to the Work Ethic

Criticisms of the work ethic, whether conceived as Protestant, American, or otherwise, are interrelated, but at least three strands can be isolated. The work ethic is said to be meaningless, outdated, or unethical. These objections will be treated here in terms of the arguments from alienation, the arguments from affluence, and the arguments from ideology.

The alienation of the worker from his work is a phenomenon generally associated with the industrial revolution. The factory worker may not know his boss, may have little understanding of what he is making, and usually has no idea at all of who will use it. The idea of "vocation" as service to God through service to man or the concept of the "Holy Community" is hard to apply.

17. Weber, pp. 48-50; p. 192, n. 2.

18. Quoted by Robert S. Michaelson in "The Gospel of Work in America," *Social Action*, 15:4, December 15, 1949.

19. Troeltsch, *Op. cit.*, p. 611.

Anyone who has punched a clock in a present day factory can adduce current evidence to show that while there is more than bread on the worker's mind, there is little or no gospel of work.²⁰

Closely associated with the industrial revolution and the alienation of the worker from his work is the loss of the sense of craftsmanship. Hannah Arendt distinguishes between the "labor" of the body—energy exerted to produce what is needed to live—and the "work" of the hands—the creating of that which is lasting.²¹ The present emphasis on production and consumption, she says, has brought all professions down to the level of "making a living." The only real "worker" left is the artist, and his work is often regarded merely as "play."²² These distinctions do not speak in Reformation terms, for Luther and Calvin might have viewed this definition of "work" as dangerously close to idolatry and might have seen more glory in "labor." However, they do tend to illustrate the loss of meaning which pervades the current vocational scene.

Moreover, alienation today is not just alienation from the objects of work but from the whole world of work, and the application of the term goes beyond the factory worker. The most extreme examples today are found among various spokesmen of the New Left and members of certain hippie communities who sense either a lack of positive meaning or an actual evil (e.g. "exploitation") in all of the available job options. As a reaction some have "dropped out" of the system altogether, starting communes where all the work done is for the sake of the group, or have advocated (only partly in jest) stealing as a moral alternative to working at exploitive or otherwise meaningless jobs. Recent estimates of the annual drop-out rate run as high as 20,000, and there are over 300 known communes in the United States, populated often by bright and well educated persons.²³

On the other hand, many who have not dropped out are equally disturbed. A recent study of Stanford and Berkeley undergraduates revealed that vocational choice is seen by students as a threat instead of an opportunity. Likewise among persons already employed, discontent with work is a growing source of emotional illness.²⁴ The Calvinist worked

20. de Grazia, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

21. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 80.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

23. Lewis M. Andrews, "Communes and the Work Crisis," *The Nation*, 113: 460-61, November 9, 1970.

24. *Ibid.*

to assure himself of his own election and to serve his brother. To him, work (at least theoretically) became a joy and a prayer. The present generation does not have that theological motivation and is not convinced that the humanitarian motivation applies to much of modern work. The work ethic has become the work problem.

While many argue that the industrial revolution has alienated the worker, thus rendering the work ethic meaningless, others would assert that the same revolution has brought about an affluence which makes the work ethic outdated. The writing of the Bible, the Reformation, and the founding of America all took place in situations of scarcity. Every man's work was necessary to produce the goods and services needed for every man's good. Idleness was a sin against society. Cooperation rather than competition was the general rule. Today, goods are available in abundance, and planned obsolescence and persuasive advertising are necessary to insure the sale of what is produced. Luxuries become necessities, and wages and prices rise accordingly. The earth is exploited and polluted, all for the sake of the gross national product.

In such a milieu, the problems of unemployment and poverty must be viewed from a new angle. When the young, the poor, and the Black see the bumper sticker "I fight poverty—I work," they are tempted to shout "Why?" The traditional remedy for those excluded either by accident or design from the economic system has been to make them "productive members of society."

Are we desperately dependent on the diligence of the worker who applies maroon and pink enamel to the functionless bulge of a modern motor car? The idle man may still be an enemy of himself. But it is hard to say that the loss of his effort is damaging to society.²⁵

And to put it even more tellingly,

The ethos of scarcity, has lost all meaning. It is not decent—but clearly unethical and immoral—for human beings to starve while grain rots in the granaries . . . if a human being must envy a mule who, no longer needed to pull a wagon, may graze in peace; and . . . for a human being to hope for per-

25. John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), p. 290.

mission to continue the mind-destroying labor which can be done by a machine.²⁶

To quote as a proof-text II Thessalonians 3:10b, ". . . if any would not work, neither should he eat," is less than convincing as a response to the argument from affluence.

Arguments that the work ethic is unethical or immoral may arise out of the historical phenomena mentioned already or out of ideologies both new and old which differ in basic presuppositions from traditional Protestantism. Space does not permit a survey of certain Eastern religions which put a higher value upon passivity than toil, but brief mention will be made of certain Western points of view at variance with the work ethic.

Marxism was conceived as a movement of the workers; even in Communist countries today, music, art, and literature glorify the laboring classes. Marx, however, insisted that the aim of a revolution could not possibly be the already-accomplished emancipation of the laboring classes, but must consist in the emancipation of man from labor. Hannah Arendt sees this as the only strictly utopian element in Marx's teachings, but one which seems somewhat less utopian today.²⁷ In such a utopia, services would have to be performed, but these apparently would be performed by volunteers who viewed their work as something of a "hobby."

Lewis Andrews cites two apparently divergent pseudo-philosophies, currently popular among the young, which stand in opposition to the work ethic as generally understood. The first, oddly enough, is designated neo-Puritanism and has the effect of demeaning any form of work done for money, which includes almost all existing jobs. This quest for self-justification is usually dedicated to solving social ills through community organizing, working in free clinics, tutoring ghetto school children and the like.²⁸ The opposite of this is neo-Freudianism, popularized by Norman Brown (*Life Against Death*) and Herbert Marcuse (*Eros and Civilization*), which strives for the resurrection of the Pleasure Principle. According to Brown, most hard work is the attempt to get rid of the guilt which society has instilled by repressing the Pleasure Principle.²⁹ This latter position finds some parallel in Walter Kerr's *The Decline of Pleasure*. He

26. Henry Clark, "Value Questions and Policy Proposals for a Society of Abundance," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 21: 415-6, May, 1966, quoting Alice Mary Hilton, "Cyberculture—The Age of Abundance and Leisure," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 3:228, October, 1964.

27. Arendt, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-31.

28. "Communes and the Work Crisis," p. 462.

29. *Ibid.*

says,

We are all of us compelled to read for profit, party for contracts, lunch for contracts, bowl for unity, drive for mileage, gamble for charity, go out for the evening for the greater glory of the municipality, and stay home for the weekend to rebuild the house . . . The twentieth century has relieved us of labor without relieving us of the conviction that only labor is meaningful.³⁰

Finally, the work ethic is attacked by certain theologians, who see the continuing glorification of work as a form of idolatry. This idolatry occurs whenever one's human worth or acceptance in society is made to depend upon his work.³¹ Harvey Cox likewise asserts that work has become a religion, and thereby many human beings are wrongly denied their passport to participation in the economy.³²

The increasing use of terms such as "celebration of life" in religious circles is illustrative of the protest against the idolatry of work. Henry Clark, making a theological response to cybernation states rather boldly,

even though it is possible that service to some neighbors will always be needed it is not difficult to imagine situations in which a rigid idea that one ought to be "useful" or "of service" can produce all kinds of pointless irritations, frustrations and conflicts—far more evil, in other words, than simple relaxation and confidence that if anyone really needs service, he will call for it.³³

Most of the challenges enumerated here have in common the conviction that the twentieth century presents a new situation in which the high value placed upon work by traditional Protestantism is actually dysfunctional. This possibility should not be dismissed without serious consideration. An attempt will be made to evaluate it in the concluding section of this article.

III. A Look at the Scriptures

Any evaluation either of the Protestant work ethic or the challenges

30. (New York: Time Reading Program special edition, 1966), p. 31.

31. Gordon J. Dahl, "Time, Work and Leisure Today," *Christian Century*, February 10, 1969, p. 187, and Paul Hessert, *New Directions in Theology Today: Volume V: Christian Life* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 87.

32. *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1965), pp. 183-91.

33. "Value Questions and Policy Proposals . . .," p. 402.

to it should be preceded by a study of the Scriptures which relate to the issue. Limitations of space obviously preclude any extensive treatment of this area. It must suffice to mention a number of biblical texts and themes worthy of further study, and to commend certain analyses already done by more competent students of the scriptures.

It is commonly asserted that the Hebrews valued work more highly than their neighbors. The fact that God Himself is viewed as a worker (Genesis 2:2) is evidence for this fact. Although Israel's neighbors considered work useful because great things could be accomplished thereby, the hard work was left entirely to the women, the slaves, and the laboring class. For the Hebrew, although work was under the curse of the fall, work itself was not degraded; the fact that work yields results in a world which otherwise withholds its bounties was accepted as a sign of God's kindness.³⁴ Hannah Arendt says that slavery in classical antiquity was not a device for cheap labor but an attempt to exclude labor from the condition of man's life. What men share with other forms of animal life was not considered human, and this was the basis of the Greek theory of the non-human nature of the slave.³⁵ Although the Hebrews practiced slavery, their attitude toward the slaves and toward their own work does not parallel the Greek view. That Jesus was trained as a carpenter, that Paul was a tentmaker, and that rabbis were all supposed to support themselves by a trade, witness further to the fact that the strictly contemplative life was not the Hebrew or Christian ideal.

Throughout the Old Testament, man is commanded to work. Genesis 2:15 indicates that man's work preceded the fall. The Sabbath command in the Decalogue seems to include the command to work six days a week. Proverbs 6:6-11 is a good example of that book's condemnation of the idle.

The New Testament assumes that the Christian should work diligently. In a spiritual sense (if one wishes so to designate it) God labors in the work of salvation (e.g. John 5:17; Philippians 2:13), and the apostles as well as other Christians are fellow workers with God (I Corinthians 3:9; II Corinthians 6:1). The passages in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12 speak of gifts to be used in the work of the Church. The use of the term "calling" in I Corinthians 7:20, so important for Luther, may indicate a kind of unity between the Christian's spiritual work in the Church and his secular work in the world, but the verse, indeed the whole passage, is very difficult to interpret adequately.

34. Otto Piper, "The Meaning of Work," *Theology Today*, 14:174, July, 1957.
35. *The Human Condition*, p. 84.

There can be no doubt, however, of the fact that the New Testament expects Christians to work faithfully at their secular jobs. Colossians 3:22-23 indicates that slaves are to think of themselves as working for the Lord. Titus 2:9, 10 and I Timothy 6:1 exhort slaves to work faithfully so that the name of God will be thought of more highly. Colossians 4:1 urges masters or employers to treat those under them justly, since they themselves have a Master in heaven. Still work is not only for God; it is the approved way of supplying one's own physical needs (so as not to be a burden on others), and of gaining the necessary resources to help others in their need (I Thessalonians 4:12, Ephesians 4:28).

Although the scriptures commend work, they even more emphatically condemn greed and over-attention to money (e.g. Proverbs 23:3-5 and Matthew 6:19). Christians are to be content with the material things they have (Philippians 4:11-13; I Timothy 6:7-10). Although the Old Testament frequently gives the impression that prosperity is the natural result of service to God and poverty the result of laziness and sin (e.g. Psalm 37; Proverbs 6:10-11), the book of Job and some of the prophets indicate that the matter is not quite so simple. In the New Testament, both Jesus and James tend to link wealth with sin and leave the impression that the poor are special objects of God's love.

Paul teaches that religious "works" do not suffice to make men right with God. Similarly, Psalm 127:2 teaches that a frantic attention to toil is not the way to material security. Jesus' words in the home of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) serve as a warning against undue busy-ness. When Paul spoke of "redeeming the time" (Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5), it is doubtful that he had in mind the enslavement to the clock so typical of Western culture. The primary object of the fourth commandment is rest and reverence on the Sabbath, not the work to be done on the other days; there is no hint that this rest is designed simply to prepare one for more and harder work. The exact meaning of the "rest" which remains for the people of God in Hebrews 4 is not clear, but in the book of Revelation the final condition of the saints involves an existence without work, except service and praise of God.

A recent study by two Swedish biblical scholars, Ivan Engnell and Bertil Gärtner,³⁶ concludes that the scriptures contain a basically "utilitarian" attitude toward work. Work is not just a result of the fall. Neither is it valued for its own sake. It is simply a part of the human condition, according to God's order. God is seen as the giver of all things, including

36. "The Biblical Attitude to Work," *Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok*, 25:5-18, 1962.

the strength to work. Extensive documentation is given from both Testaments.

The most thorough study of the biblical position regarding work known to this writer is a small (80 pages) book by Alan Richardson entitled *The Biblical Doctrine of Work*.³⁷ Much as Engnell and Gartner, he sees work as a "given." It is not essentially degrading, but neither is it "creative" in the sense that God's work is. The idea of "work as worship" finds no biblical justification. It, like worship, is a part of the Christian's obedience or "service" to God. In worship, however, one does offer to God the fruits of his work. On the subject of the relationship between "work" and "vocation," Richardson says,

The Bible knows no instance of a man's being called to an earthly trade or profession by God. St. Paul, for example, is called by God to be an apostle; he is not "called" to be a tent maker . . . We cannot with propriety speak of God's calling man to be an engineer or a doctor or a schoolmaster. God calls doctors and engineers and schoolmasters to be prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers as laymen in his Church, just as he calls brick-layers, engine-drivers, and machine-minders.³⁸

Anyone interested in formulating a Christian stance toward the world of work would do well to give careful attention to this book.

IV. Evaluations, Clarifications, and Suggestions

No doubt this brief survey of the historical, current, and biblical issues has raised more questions in the reader's mind than the writer can answer within the scope of the space available or by his own competence. In this final section, however, an attempt will be made to evaluate the Protestant work ethic, to clarify certain confusing issues and terms, and to suggest some possibilities for Christian response to the problems of work in the modern world.

It is important to realize that parts of the stereotype of the Protestant work ethic in the minds of its critics, as well as much of what is said and done in its name by its defenders, is neither Protestant nor biblical. If the Protestant work ethic means striving for wealth, neglect or condemnation of the poor, or legalistic enslavement to the clock, Jesus was

37. Alan Richardson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Work* (London: SCM Press, 1952).

38. *Op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

not a Protestant, and neither, indeed, were Luther, Calvin, and Wesley, although Wesley might be criticized on the last point. How ironic that a movement which attacked justification by works should, a few centuries later, be attacked for alleged idolatry of work.

When Luther³⁹ spoke of vocation in relationship to work, his main purpose was to show that one did not have to leave his "secular" job to serve Christ fully. Some of today's drop-outs, who reject any job connected with money, because of the exploitation inherent in the capitalistic economic system, would probably receive Luther's condemnation just as strongly as did the monastic orders. The charge would be "self-justification." Luther saw the call of God as a call to membership in a kingdom above all earthly position. Work was simply one way of fulfilling God's plan and serving one's fellow men. Its importance was not primarily economic. Merely to do one's job, without faith, was to serve the devil.

Calvin⁴⁰ did stress the importance of work itself more than Luther, but even he put primary emphasis on the glorification of God and participation in the Holy Community. Work was a means to an end. Material gain was not simply the fruit of one's own labors but the gift of God to be handled with a sense of stewardship. His individualism might have inclined him away from socialism, with its state control of the economy, but his intense awareness of human sin and selfishness would also have kept him from trusting the "invisible hand" of the free market to bring about economic justice.

The English Protestants, both Puritan and Anglican, noted the importance of work and condemned idleness. Even the Puritans, who are often held responsible for de-Christianizing the Protestant ethic, recognized the obligations which God's gift of wealth placed upon the receiver. Breen, in the article cited earlier, says that in the seventeenth century the Puritans were actually more inclined to almsgiving than the Anglicans. Neither group put as much emphasis on the moral duty to increase one's wealth as Weber and others state on the basis of isolated examples.

Certainly no other evidence should need be adduced to show that greed for gain has no place in the life of the Christian. The cross of Jesus Christ should be evidence enough that earthly success is not the main criterion for judging one's election. A visit to a typical Black or Spanish-speaking Protestant congregation in America or just about any church on an overseas mission field should be evidence enough that the Northwest

39. See Wingren, *op. cit.*, Piper, *op. cit.*, p. 176, and George Forell, "Work and the Christian Calling," *Lutheran Quarterly* 8:105-19, May, 1966.

40. See Bieler, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-61 and Troeltsch, *op. cit.*, p. 607.

European heritage of clock-watching is not essential to warm-hearted Christian devotion and service.

However, the matter of welfare or "wages without work" seems to raise more red flags among conservative Protestants. In Luther's thought the chief social questions with which a Christian government should deal involved the support of those who were unable to earn their living within the social hierarchy of "callings." There is nothing in II Thessalonians 3:10 which prohibits welfare *per se*. Those individuals who are not to eat are those who simply refuse to work, on allegedly theological grounds. The passage cannot be made to apply to persons who through discrimination, age, poor health, inadequate training, or a scarcity of jobs are excluded from the world of work. Granted all the abuses of present welfare systems, surveys repeatedly show very few healthy adult men on the rolls. Granted a certain temptation to idleness inherent in any guaranteed annual income proposal, the wealthy Christian is hard pressed to justify his enjoyment of the benefits of the affluent society while some of his fellow countrymen starve.

The Reformers may have underestimated the ultimate impact of the economic revolution which was taking place around them and which they, in part, affirmed. Luther's response to the Peasant's Rebellion is evidence of this. Calvin may have done more harm than good by stressing the economic virtues, including the re-investment of surplus profits. Still it is not Protestantism (or even Puritanism) but, rather, ignorance and egotism which elevates the values of a particular culture, class, or nation to the level of divine "institutions." It is not the Protestant work ethic but, rather, greed and selfishness which forsakes discipleship for security. It is not the concept of "work as worship" but, rather, secularism and idolatry which sacrifices family, church, and community responsibilities for the sake of the "corporation." Neither is it merely a misunderstanding of the doctrine of election but, rather, pride and self-deception which makes a man, in the words of R. H. Tawney,

ascribe his achievements to his own unaided efforts, in bland unconsciousness of a social order without whose continuous support and vigilant protection he would be as a lamb bleating in the desert.⁴¹

One may laughingly dismiss the protest of the student who uses his father's credit card to travel across the nation denouncing capitalism; it is more difficult to ignore these words of a Black, Evangelical layman,

41. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (Oxford: John Murray, 1926), p. 267.

Donald Oden:

If America and Europe gained their wealth by hard work, what part was played by slaves, sharecroppers, child labor, migrant workers, colonization, big business goon squads, monopolies, cheating the weak and ignorant, and owner-paid strikebreakers?

Can't you just hear Pharaoh saying to the children of Israel, "I've got where I am by hard work."⁴²

Oden, Tawney and other critics acknowledge the importance of diligence and thrift, which the Protestant work ethic stresses. Although numerous other positive contributions could be cited, at this point in time it seems more crucial to warn of the abuses to which that ethic is vulnerable.

Because many of the abuses of the Protestant work ethic seem to result from the ambiguity of the term "vocation," an attempt will be made now to clarify the concept. Biblically, the term refers to God's gracious call to salvation and service. With at least some biblical basis, Luther extended the term to designate certain positions in which Christians render service.

The stations and offices, or neighborly relationships, are creatures or ordinances of God, through which He calls men to the service of their neighbors; and they therefore also can be described as 'commands' and 'vocations.' There is no one who is not thus called by God, Luther insists, since everyone is in a station of one kind or another—as a married man or woman, for instance, or as a son or daughter, or a prince, or a lord spiritual or temporal. He laments moreover, that people neglect these commands and vocations in favor of pilgrimages and other supposedly holy works, so that no one takes his station seriously.⁴³

It is unfortunate that the idea of vocation today has been narrowed down to what one does on his job. One who responds to God's call will surely bring forth good works. For many Christians, some of these works will be performed in the course of doing a job. For all Christians, many of these works will be performed in other contexts. It is conceivable that a Christian man, in a society with a guaranteed annual income, might for-sake the added material benefits which would accrue from a paying job

42. "Work Work Work," p. 13.

43. Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), p. 113.

and devote all his "working" hours, for at least a part of his life, to his family, his church, and his community. For years housewives have done this, and few of them would want it said that they do not "work" or that they are parasites on society.

The option of no "job" may not be a live one for the general populace very soon, but even now it seems safe to say that the work which the Christian does to fulfill his vocation may take place as much in his so-called "leisure" time as on the job.⁴⁴ If Jesus followed the rules for a first century rabbi, he must have worked at a secular job to earn some support. It is interesting to note that many of his works of ministry were performed on the Sabbath. Perhaps the Sabbath should not be considered in the same category as other leisure time, but this at least suggests some new directions for thought. The use of Sunday and the use of other leisure time demand more thoughtful attention by Christians, even though many have observed that the average person's actual leisure time today is not really much greater than thirty years ago. (Because of overtime, moonlighting, commuting time, etc.) In early Methodism, many wealthy converts spent their leisure time in philanthropic activity.⁴⁵ This is not a plea for a legalistic compulsion to "make every second count," but it is a challenge to the thoughtless tendency to spend all leisure time in idleness or needless consumption activities which may be more tiring and less gratifying and upbuilding than "work."

Nevertheless, it is important to relate the theological use of the term "vocation" to the commonly accepted secular usage. In spite of automation, there are many jobs which have to be done. None of these jobs involves sheer joy and fulfillment during every moment; that is one reason why money has to be offered. It has been suggested that the idea that all work should be a continuous experience of intellectual and emotional delight is a misconception fostered by certain television programs.⁴⁶ In a fallen world all work has an element of "travail." This does not mean, of course, that the Christian should not strive to eliminate dehumanizing aspects of any given job. In every generation the theologians and the laity (if such a distinction can be made) must work together to discover how work may become vocation. The following five statements are merely suggestive:

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44. See Philip Wogamann, *Guaranteed Annual Income: The Moral Issues* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1968), pp. 60-61 for an "active" definition of leisure which corresponds to a broad definition of work.
45. Wellman J. Warner, *The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930), p. 192.
46. Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 461.

1. Work in which the Christian engages should be useful, rather than harmful, to society.
2. The Christian's place of work should also be a place of witness—an arena for living out the personal implications of his faith and obedience.
3. The tools and skills which the Christian uses in his trade should be made available for the direct service of Christ's Church when appropriate.
4. The insights gained in the world of work should be used to inform the Church as she formulates her stance on various issues.

In the face of the charge of work idolatry, it must be reasserted that "the Christian doctrine of work is focused upon God more than upon work."⁴⁷ While Rome is tempted to think in Aristotelian categories and consider work at best a necessary evil, Wittenberg and Geneva are tempted to see work as an end in itself, an absolute good.⁴⁸ The naively optimistic vision of a work-free society, or one in which all work is entirely optional, is neither realistic nor desirable. However, neither work nor its fruits is capable of yielding the full satisfaction which comes through communion with God and love of neighbor. The ethic of work can never stand alone. It must be a part of the ethic of grace, gratitude, and celebration, as proclaimed by Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Barth, and the rest of Protestantism's finest spokesmen.

In a journal devoted to "The Wesleyan Message in the Life and Thought of Today," one might legitimately expect to find, in an article on this subject, more attention to John Wesley's view of work. These concluding paragraphs are a commentary on Wesley's well-known formula, "gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can," from his sermon on "The Use of Money."⁴⁹ For insight into the radical implications of Wesley's attitude toward work and wealth (not just in this sermon but throughout his writings), the writer is indebted most of all to the last nine chapters of Dr. Mary Alice Tenney's excellent analysis of the Wesleyan Way, entitled *Blueprint for a Christian World*.⁵⁰

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47. David Moberg, *Inasmuch: Christian Social Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 148.
 48. Forrell, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
 49. *Wesley's Standard Sermons*, Edited by Edward H. Sugden (London: The Epworth Press, 1921), pp. 309-327.
 50. (Winona Lake, Indiana: Light and Life Press, 1953).

Wesley's exhortation to "gain all you can" was little more than a command to work diligently. It did not, for example, involve choosing the most lucrative field of labor when deciding upon a life's work. In his later ministry, as he foresaw the secularization of second generation Methodism, he became quite outspoken against the "vile earthly-mindedness" that governed the choices of many parents for the vocations of their sons. Particularly to be shunned was any work which harms the body or soul of either the worker or the neighbor, work with unhealthy hours, work connected with the liquor trade, and work involving cut-throat competition.⁵¹ This is reminiscent of early Christianity.

Christians took part in all the general conditions of life and industry, and avoided only those callings which were impossible for them as Christians; those who had lost their work for this reason were cared for by the Church. In those stern early days, however, this principle of excluding all unsuitable employments cut very deeply into life. All offices and callings were barred which had any connection with idol worship, or with the worship of the Emperor, or those which had anything to do with bloodshed or with capital punishment, or those which would bring Christians into contact with pagan immorality.⁵²

These qualifications have much to say to the present day. The production, advertising, and distribution of unnecessary or harmful goods, for which an artificial "need" must be created, should come under careful scrutiny. In spite of twentieth century advances, much factory work is still very degrading, many mines are unsafe, and many industries wreak havoc upon the environment. Christians in management positions must become increasingly sensitive to such things.

In a day of conspicuous consumption (e.g., \$25,000 bathrooms, annual fashion changes, planned obsolescence, enormous sums spent on cosmetics, pets, entertainment), the injunction to "save all you can" assumes new relevance. The limits of expenditure which Wesley set for the Methodists were, as summarized by Dr. Tenney:

first, "to provide for giving all men their due"—to owe nothing; secondly, "to provide sufficient plain, wholesome food, plain raiment," and all "the household necessities of life"—to be economically selfsufficient; thirdly, to leave his children upon

51. *Ibid.*

52. Troeltsch, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

his death "in a capacity of providing" for themselves within the standards he had set for himself; fourthly, "to lay up from time, that needed for carrying on worldly business in such measure and degree as is sufficient to answer the foregoing purposes." To spend more than this was to succumb to the love of money.⁵³

How many American "Wesleyans" adhere to such standards? If Christians in sufficient numbers would make common cause, on this one point, with concerned environmentalists, humanists, and even certain sincere "drop-outs," the dangerous orgy of consumption, in which America is now engaged, could be tempered, if never entirely halted.

A normal, healthy practice of the first two elements of Wesley's formula led many Methodists to become wealthy. As many of the wealthy seemed to succumb to temptation, Wesley came to put more emphasis upon the last part, "give all you can." He opposed any theory of stewardship based upon the material rewards of giving or upon spiritual merit gained thereby. His emphasis was more on the practice than the doctrine. He believed that the Christian was to look upon himself as one of the "poor" whose wants are to be supplied out of the substance God puts in his hands—the remainder is for giving, for the needs of the poor and the evangelization of the world.⁵⁴

A look at the current economic picture shows a strange combination of overproduction, underemployment, and the apparent lack of funds to meet the challenges of the urban and ecological crises, the nagging specter of poverty, and the Church's unfinished task of evangelism. A comparison between the salaries of those in the entertainment world (to cite only one possible example) with those in the so-called "helping" professions is further evidence that something has gone wrong in the American or Western system of values. John Kenneth Galbraith seems to be on the right track when he calls for "investment in human as distinct from material capital."⁵⁵ There are many jobs which desperately need to be done but for which, with an excessive emphasis upon production, there is now no "market." Some of these jobs, indeed "vocations" in the fullest sense, could be performed by the relatively unskilled, others by the highly trained whose present jobs might be endangered by a de-emphasis on material production. This writer is not widely read in the field of economic theory, but he finds it exhilarating to imagine what could happen if

53. Tenney, *op. cit.*, pp. 203-04.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20.

55. Galbraith, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

Christian wealth were liberated from needless consumption and channeled into giving for meaningful goals—through the Church, through foundations, through individual philanthropy, and even, under certain circumstances, through the willing acceptance of tax increases. To quote once more from Dr. Tenney,

The chief reason for the failure of Methodism to make its proper contribution to the Industrial Revolution was not its evaluation of the economic virtues. It was its refusal to adopt the Wesleyan way for the use of money, a refusal which amounted to a rejection of the doctrine of perfect love . . . Had the response to the dictates of love which led early Methodists to accept all the obligations of stewardship continued, there is no telling how radical an expression of Christianity might have ensued.⁵⁶

This last third of the twentieth century provides as many obstacles to Christian discipleship as did any part of the first, sixteenth, or eighteenth centuries. The Protestant work ethic, when separated from the perversions which so easily attach to it, is one possible perspective from which to formulate an appropriate Christian ethical offensive. Now, as in every age, it is the responsibility of the whole Church to discover anew the proper means of relating vocation, work, wealth, leisure, and love.

56. Tenney, *op. cit.*, pp. 273, 275.